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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DAR ES SALAAM 000722

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

AF/E FOR JAMES LIDDLE; INR FOR FEHRENREICH

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SUBJECT: CLEAR OPPOSITION VICTORY IN MAINLAND BY-ELECTION

REF: DAR 647 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Opposition party Chadema held on to its Tarime parliamentary seat in a hard fought by-election October 12. Despite low turnout and an aggressive campaign by the ruling CCM, the Chadema candidate won with a comfortable margin. An observer mission of diplomatic staff from the U.S., Canada and several EU countries encountered a well-run election process. Chadema allegations of widespread CCM vote-buying and intimidation appeared to be significantly overblown, although the atmosphere of violence during the campaign may have contributed heavily to the low turnout. While the polling was calm, police used tear gas to disperse crowds of Chadema supporters in Tarime town during the counting of the votes. Chadema claimed its victory represented a springboard for major gains in the 2010 general elections.

¶2. (U) Chadema candidate Charles Mwera won the Tarime by-election with 53 percent of the vote. The CCM candidate, Ryoba Kangoye, took 44 percent, and two candidates of smaller parties received the remainder (between them, fewer than the number of spoiled ballots). While lower than the 58 percent obtained by Chadema in 2005, the margin of victory remained significant, large enough to head off any potential dispute. Chadema also won convincingly in the by-election for ward councilor in Tarime town. With the victory, Chadema retains its total of five elected seats in parliament, eleven total including special seats for women. (Note: There are 232 directly elected seats in parliament and 323 total. CCM holds more than 85 percent. The largest opposition party in parliament, CUF, has 19 elected seats, 30 total.)

¶3. (U) Turnout in Tarime declined from around 85 percent in 2005 to 46 percent in 2008. The conventional wisdom that low turnout would help CCM proved limited, at best. Of the various explanations we heard for the low turnout, the most common was that prospective voters had been scared away by the violence that occurred during the campaign. Others attributed the low numbers to lack of voter interest in a by-election, which would have no overall impact on parliament and did not involve a presidential election.

¶4. (U) Embassy staff joined with diplomats and Tanzanian staff from the missions of Canada, UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the European Commission as accredited observers for the election. We met with the leading candidates, election officials and police, attended rallies the day before the election, and visited numerous polling stations across the district on election day. We also observed the counting process, both within individual polling stations and during the final tabulation at the district office.

¶15. (U) Overall, the electoral process appeared to run well and impartially. Polling stations were managed by two National Electoral Commission (NEC) officials, and agents from the two main parties were present. In many polling stations, the small opposition party NCCR-Mageuzi also had an agent. The polling stations, which generally opened and closed on time, were equipped with sufficient ballots, forms and supplies. The NEC officials and party agents verified the identity of voters by checking their voting cards - with picture - against the registration lists. After casting the ballot, the voter received an ink mark on the left little finger from a NEC official. While we observed slight variations in practice and some cases of confusion by the officials, for the most part the NEC appeared to have trained them well.

¶16. (U) After the completion of voting, the NEC officials meticulously counted the ballots in the presence of the agents, who had the opportunity to challenge any questionable votes. In the stations we observed, there were few disputes, and the NEC officials and party agents all signed the final results document, which was then posted outside the station. The checks on the counting process would make tampering difficult.

¶17. (U) Outside the polling stations we visited, the situation remained calm through the voting process. Armed police officers were stationed outside each group of polling stations and mobile police units made the rounds. In a few instances, the observer teams heard accusations of vote

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buying. In one case, two men allegedly accompanied several illiterate voters, marking their ballots in exchange for cash (more usually, illiterate voters would be assisted by the voter who had just finished casting a ballot); a Chadema councilwoman asked the police to intervene, and the men were told to leave the area of the village where voting was taking place.

¶18. (U) Tensions heightened once the counting began, especially in Tarime town. Chadema leaders had told their supporters to stay near the polling stations to guard against CCM manipulation. Initial poll results gathered from outside polling stations showed a Chadema lead. Party faithful on both sides communicated the results rapidly, mainly by text message. A heavy rainstorm dampened spirits and likely prevented many Chadema followers from coming into town after voting, but crowds gathered outside some of the stations. In at least one instance, the police dispersed a crowd using tear gas.

¶19. (U) The final ballot tabulation was delayed by rain until the morning of October 13 and lasted for several hours. During this time, police again used tear gas and fired warning shots to scatter a crowd of Chadema backers in Tarime town. By the morning, the Chadema candidate and party leaders were confident of victory; the CCM candidate informally acknowledged defeat to members of the observer team long before the final declaration of a winner. However, he boycotted the announcement itself and arrived at the electoral office shortly thereafter to file a complaint. According to NEC officials, candidates have no standing to challenge a result except if there are irregularities at individual polling stations; because the polling stations all reported complete results, the CCM candidate's only recourse would be a legal challenge. Senior CCM officials publicly accepted the election result shortly after Chadema was declared to have won.

¶10. (U) Chadema leaders were jubilant after the announcement that Mwera had won. MP for Kigoma and party activist Zitto Kabwe crowed over the party's first by-election victory, which he claimed would serve as a springboard for the 2010 general elections. Kabwe observed that in 2005 there were

some forty districts where the CCM candidate won with less than a majority because opposition parties were divided. He said Chadema at least was open to working with the other opposition parties for 2010.

¶11. (SBU) Comment. Much of the hype preceding the election, from both the media and the parties, appeared overblown on the day itself. While there appeared to be a few cases of small-scale vote buying, there was no evidence of comprehensive efforts to subvert the outcome. Similarly, although concerns about violence may have kept voters away from the polls - and there may also be some truth to claims of police intimidation during the campaign - there appeared to have been no disturbances during the voting. There was no evidence whatever of tampering with the ballot boxes and the count. Indeed, the NEC's system ensured that tampering would have been difficult.

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